

Connecting to Collections - Maryland Narrative

1. Need and Rational

Collections can be vulnerable to instant and devastating loss from a single catastrophic event. The 2005 National Heritage Health Index has targeted the need for heritage institutions to develop emergency plans that include consideration of collections as a principal recommendation to ensure the continued existence of America's cultural heritage collections.

Across the State of Maryland, collecting institutions are becoming more aware of the need for disaster response and preparedness planning. And while there are many guidelines available on the internet and through professional services providing training and resources, there is a lack of cohesiveness and coordination among museums, archives, galleries, libraries and historical societies within the state. Specifically, larger institutions are taking the lead on these issues and smaller facilities, that may not have comparable monetary assets, can only make gestures. Maryland is a geographically confined area in which our preservation agencies share many of the same concerns, potential hazards and challenges. What they do not have in common are the resources that, possessed by individual institutions, could prove an asset in the event of a disaster.

To determine the needs of Maryland's collecting institutions, it is necessary to bring together representatives from the various services to discuss the unique requirements of the Maryland museums community and provide optimum care of collections. This will be achieved by forming a steering committee to share information and establish a goal for Maryland collections care practices for archives, libraries and museums. Discussions would assess current practices and promote best practice for collections care and emergency planning with the aim to produce effective strategies to uphold Maryland's collections care and emergency planning to the highest standards.

2. Planning Process

The steering committee would be co-led by the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) and the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory (MAC Lab) at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum. In the late 1990s MHT's Museum Assistance Program and the Small Museum Association serving museums throughout the mid-Atlantic region created, for the state's small history museums, a series of publications that addressed collections issues. The series began with guidelines for developing a collections policy and then offered guidance for housekeeping techniques and planning, collections care for metals and furniture, and an overview of collections management practices. These publications, along with workshops on how to use them, provided participants from the state's more than 200 historical and cultural museums with practical advice. In addition to the workshops, copies of the publications were available through an informal lending library coordinated by the state's major history museums, the Small Museum Association, and MHT. MHT's experience and professional network are important assets that will assist in the development and implementation of this project. Forty-five Maryland museums have requested the IMLS Connecting to Collections bookshelves to inform staff and volunteers of the needs of collections care.

The MAC Lab is a state-of-the-art archaeological research, conservation, and collections storage facility that has active partnerships across the state. Due to the extensive conservation facilities, the MAC Lab has assisted in several disaster recovery projects including the treatment of Historic Jamestown's archaeological collections, damaged from flooding caused by Hurricane Isabel in 2003. After a flood at Washington College, the Lab's freeze drier was used to treat the books and papers from the College's collection. Objects from the Kirwan House on the Eastern Shore were brought to the MAC Lab for emergency conservation treatment after a flood damaged their facilities. In addition to disaster recovery efforts, the MAC Lab offers advice to museums experiencing structural challenges. The Calvert Marine Museum requested the Lab's assessment of their lighthouse screw piles, and the Lab consulted with the town of Havre de Grace on what steps should be taken with their disintegrating canal gates. Other partners in the proposed project include the Maryland State Archives, Nabb Center (Salisbury University), Enoch Pratt Library State Library Resource Center (Baltimore), State Librarian (Maryland State Department of Education), Calvert Marine Museum, Maryland Historical Society, Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, Walters Art Gallery, Frederick County Historical Society, the regional library system for Calvert and St. Mary's Counties and the Small Museums Association (SMA). These partner institutions represent a broad perspective across the museum, archival, art, historical society and library communities.

From the data gathered from the input of these committee members and, through them, sub-committee meetings comprised of members from each of the above communities and not

restricted to the partner organizations, this project would aim to establish two categories of information:

- an assemblage of the unique conditions and concerns held by collecting institutions with regard to potential disaster issues within the State of Maryland, and
- a compilation of those resources available within the state that are able to assist in the recovery efforts and rehabilitation of institutions affected by a disaster event.

A direct product from the latter pool of information would be produced in the form of a pocket response guide. This guide would contain contact details for both state-specific disaster preparedness planning and disaster response resources in conjunction with planning and response checklists. This information would then be distributed to all interested museums, archives, galleries, libraries and historical societies within the state.

Additionally, the information collected will be used to adapt and customize the automated disaster planning template, dPlan, developed by the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), for use among Maryland's collecting institutions. At present, dPlan is focused primarily for use by libraries and archives. Modifying the current dPlan format to incorporate the needs of object-based collections would provide valuable support and information to museums and historical societies, as well as libraries and archives. The Maryland dPlan (MdPlan) would be held on a MAC Lab server in order to provide security of the institutional data. Training opportunities would be provided by the MAC Lab to introduce NEDCC's automated disaster planning tool and to promote disaster planning awareness. These activities would take part following the activities outlined for this planning grant, and are therefore not included in this application.

3. Project Resources

Personnel:

Calvert Marine Museum - **Doug Alves**, Director

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum – **Pete Leshner**, Curator of Collections

Enoch Pratt Free Library – **Wayne Wesley**, Chief, Central Library/State Library Resource Center

Frederick Historical Society - **Mark S. Hudson**, Executive Director

Library Development & Services – **Irene Padilla**, Assistant State Superintendent (State Librarian)

Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory - **Nichole Doub**, Head Conservator

Maryland Historical Society (MdHS) - **Louise T. Brownell**, Chief Registrar

Maryland Historical Trust –**Mary Alexander**, Director of the Museum Advancement Program

Maryland State Archives - **Vicki Lee**, Head of Conservation

Small Museums Association - **Mike DiPaolo**, Annual Conference Chair

Southern Maryland Regional Library Association (SMRLA) - **Sharan Marshall**, Executive Director

The Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture - **Dr. G. Ray Thompson**, Director

Walters Art Gallery – **Terry Weisser**, Head Conservator

**see Project Staff Resumes for partner biographies*

Budget:

Given the variety of skills, knowledge and resources possessed by the partner agencies, this project is requesting funding to facilitate the collation and dissemination of these assets in order to publish this information in a format that will become accessible to the wider Maryland collections community. The IMLS funding will provide for:

- A part-time project coordinator,
- Travel expense for partner meeting attendance,
- Professional facilitation of stakeholder meetings,
- Production of the Maryland Pocket Response Guide,
- Consultation from NEDCC for adaptation of the dPlan template and initial training in its use, and
- Zaks Software services in modifying the dPlan program and installation of the software onto the MAC Lab servers.

Long term results and benefits:

The primary goals of this project are to produce a comprehensive and accessible collection of resources for both disaster planning and recovery efforts. Disaster preparedness will be further assisted by the development of a customized planning template. MdPlan will not only facilitate the production of institutional disaster plans, it will prompt organizations to address other collections care issues.

In addition to the tangible achievements, this project aims to initiate professional dialogue among libraries, archives, museums, art galleries and historical societies where there is currently very little interdisciplinary communication. While our collections and patrons may have varying care and accessibility requirements, we all share the same responsibility to ensure their continued safety and preservation.